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AUTHOR Spraggins, Mary Pringle
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ABSTRACT

The term androgyny, with its sex-related etymology, is based on untenable social stereotypes and for feminist critics is a dead end. The androgyny myth, like matriarchal myths and myths which deify women, should be replaced. However, a replacement would have to fill a wide niche in order to allow critics to focus from a propitious vantage point on women writers and characters. As a replacement, Carl Jung's theories about personality types may provide both an improved method of understanding the characterization of women in literature and a basis for understanding the work of women writers. Furthermore, Jung's myth of paired, opposing characteristics has a literary parellel in the poetry of William Blake and his mythological descriptions of the mind. (JM)

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Awakening Albia: Feminist Mythologies Beyond Androgyny

Mary Pringle Spraggins

In the two years since publication of Carolyn Heilbrun's Toward a Recognition of Androgyny,[1] no critical term has received more attention than androgyny. Attention paid the term has gone beyond the bounds of feminist periodicals, caucuses, and women's studies classes. At the November meeting of the Midwest Modern Language Association, for example, an androgyny debate was the focus of the American Literature II section, chaired by Susan Friedman. At the section meeting, Nancy Topping Bazin[2] and Cathy Davidson[3] presented compelling papers that argued in behalf of the critical potential of androgyny. Bazin's paper placed the term in a social context. "The androgynous vision," she said, "involves the elimination of all barriers which divide human beings from one another . . . the male/female image of androgyny is a cultural one representing the elimination of sex roles and the reintegration into our value system of those positive qualities (such as tenderness, sensitivity, receptiveness, beauty) that our culture has traditionally labeled 'feminine.'"[4] Davidson's paper argued that "even though the concept of androgyny can imply the most stereotyped ideas of sexual polarities, it nevertheless violates the 'sacred' opposites by yoking them (with violence, if necessary) together."[5]

My paper,[6] however, presented a contrasting point of view. The essay described androgyny as a misnomer and stated that, as a feminist critical tool, it is more destructive than useful. The essay summarized objections to use of the term (Cynthia Secor's,[7] Daniel Harris'[8]), indicating how closely related is the notion of androgyny to Carl Jung's illogical theories about the animus and anima. To replace androgyny my paper encouraged an approach to literature that would involve "a study

of complementary characteristics pivoting on a mental fulcrum,"[9] a notion similar to androgyny but one which excludes gender references. Because the paper focused on arguments <u>against</u> androgyny, however, I did not explain the phrase. Since November, I have given considerable thought to the idea of "complementary characteristics." This morning, therefore, I wish to talk about the potentials and limitations of myth and to explain the term "complementary characteristics" more fully, offering such an alternative phrase (or the "myth of wholeness") as a replacement for androgyny.

From the preceding summary of events at the MMLA seminar, you have perhaps already surmised that disagreement among the panelists was based on semantic issues. Also based on the summary, you can see that there were grounds for agreement among us. Each of the panelists, for instance, looks forward to a society in which individuals may assume a variety of roles without regard to gender. Each of us also agrees that androgyny is based on untenable social stereotypes. What we disagreed on were the answers to the following questions: How can androgyny best be defined? How free are we to redefine the term? In fact, our major area of disagreement concerned the mythic potential of androgyny. More specifically, we questioned whether androgyny, given its history as a sexist term, can now receive a new interpretation, take a new direction, receive new impetus from feminist criticism. Bazin and Davidson expressed optimism about the term, whereas I argued that the myth of androgyny is, for feminists, a dead end.

Please do not conclude, however, that I am pessimistic about all adaptations, reshapings and redefinitions of particular myths. I am not.

Classical mythology aside, contemporary critics are quick to reassert the myth potential of such mundane activities and objects as wrestling matches and Citroen cars.[10] Myth is a dynamic force, changing to accommodate new experience. Shelley's definition of myth, "Possibility waiting to be defined"[11] is appropriate in this context. Myth has potential in that it reflects not only what is, but also what can be; it exists beyond the bounds of time and space. As anthropologist Joan Bamberger writes, "...Myth may become through repeated recitation a moral history of action while not in itself a detailed chronology of recorded events."[12] In Les Guérillères,[13] Monique Wittig also asserts the value of myth adaptation by her reinterpretation of such sexist myths as "Snow White and Rose Red." But while recognizing the value of reshaping some myths, I assert that others hopelessly reflect the biases of the male psyche. Such patriarchal myths are wrongly assumed to have universal significance. They take feminists nowhere. Some myths need more than adaptation; they need overthrow. Such is the case with androgyny.

But the myth of androgyny is not the only myth which merits overthrow. There are others. Joan Bamberger cites one such myth in her essay, "The Myth of Matriarchy: Why Men Rule in Primitive Society."[14] In the paper, Bamberger describes several myths about the Rule of Women originating in certain South American Indian societies, especially in those from the Tierra del Fuego and from the tropical forests of the northwest Amazon and central Brazil. According to these myths, women once had authority and performed the tribal spiritual rituals. According to Bamberger's narrative source, "The women were the first to perform

Kina. At that time the women had sole power; they gave orders to the men who were obedient...The men also sat in the back at the stern, the women in front at the bow of the canoe. All the work in the hut was performed by the men, with the women giving orders."[15] Bamberger adds that the women invented the Kina hut and then fooled the men into thinking that the women were spirits. When men learned, however, that the women were merely masquerading as spirits, a war ensued in which women were vanquished. "A new social order thus came to prevail among the Yamana [the tribe under study]. The women, once the proud owners of the Kina and its secrets, gave them up and became subordinate to the men."[16] Countless other South American tribal myths contain variations of this theme. One consequence of this myth is described by Bamberger: "Wherever the myth of the Rule of Women is discovered, there also exists a set of cultural rules and procedures for determining sexual dimorphisms in social and cultural tasks."[17] Bamberger summarizes her findings in the following way:

> Myths and rituals have been misinterpreted as persistent reminders that women once had, and then lost, the seat of power. This loss accrued to them through inappropriate conduct. In Tierra del Fuego the women tricked the men into performing both male and female chores; and in the northwest Amazon they committed the crime of incest. The myths constantly reiterate that women did not know how to handle power when they had it. The loss is thereby justified so long as women choose to accept the myth. The Rule of Women, instead of heralding a promising future,

> harks back to a past darkened by repeated failures. If, in fact, women are ever going to rule, they must rid themselves of the myth that states they have been proved unworthy of leadership roles.[18]

Equally debilitating are myths--prevalent primarily in Western societies--which deify women. Such myths depict the woman as "a mystical, pure, and uncorrupted Mother Goddess."[19] Bamberger writes that,

> The elevation of woman to deity on the one hand, and the downgrading of her to child or chattel on the other, produce the same result. Such visions will not bring her any closer to attaining male socio-economic and political status, for as long as she is content to remain either goddess or child, she cannot be expected to shoulder her share of community burdens as the coequal of man. Thy myth of matriarchy [both these kinds] is but one tool used to keep woman bound to her place. To free her, we need to destroy the myth [underlining my own].[20]

Some myths infold. Androgyny with its sex-related etymology is an example of the phenomenon, since it perpetuates the very stereotyping it would destroy. Much as I yearn to believe in this miraculous, Aristotelian "yoking of opposites," in which the identity of the polar ends is lost, I cannot. Like transubstantiation and objective correlatives, androgyny is an improbable dream.

Perhaps because they envision no myth to replace androgyny, feminist critics seem reluctant to give up the term. Any replacement for androgyny would have a wide niche to fill. It must allow critics to focus from a

propitious vantage point on women writers and characters. The term must also accomplish what androgyny cannot, that is it must free us from gender stereotyping. After giving the replacement problem several months' thought, I have come up with a paradoxical solution. Carl Jung, whose animus-anima theories are so objectionable, may yet afford us the basis for an alternate mythology. Jung's theories about personality types may provide us with an improved method of understanding the characterization of women in literature and a basis for understanding the work of women writers.

Jung's theories about personality types may be summarized as follows: In his work with psychoanalysis, Jung observed the usefulness of categorizing personality types. He elected to divide the human psyche into four categories only after recognizing that opposing personality types did not work well together as analyst and patient. Jung's theory of the "compass" of the psyche posited that each human mind is controlled by one of four dominant functions: thought, feeling, sensation, or intuition. A person who is "thought" oriented adapts herself rationally to the environment and to other people. One who is "feeling" dominated tends to make judgments of value about her surroundings. A "sensation" controlled individual perceives predominantly by means of sensual experience (sight, touch, taste, odor, sound), whereas an intuitive person tends to obtain information about the environment in a non-rational way. Jung characterizes the functions in this way:

> These four personality types correspond to the obvious means by which consciousness obtains its orientation to experience. Sensation...tells you that something exists; thinking tells you what it is; feeling tells you whether it is agreeable or

> not; and intuition tells you whence it comes and where it is going.[21]

In the Jungian "compass" schema, the four functional types are arranged in a circle, intuition opposite sensation, thought opposite feeling. As with the directional compass, each facet of the individual psyche has its opposite. For instance, if one were predominantly a "thought" type, one's "feeling" side would be least developed.

What is important about the four functional types is that they transcend gender distinctions. Tests designed to assess the presence of these types in males and females have been developed during the last thirty years. Results of these tests (for example, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) suggest that gender is <u>not</u> a factor in determining function dominance. A male is as likely to score high as an "intuitive" type,--a distinction generally accorded women--with "sensation" scoring lower as a recessive function. In fact, Jung considered <u>himself</u> predominantly "intuitive."

Also significant about the function types is that they better depict the complex and dynamic nature of personality. Whereas androgyny encourages a stereotyped bi-polar view of sexuality, the Jungian function-type model sets an indefinite number of paired characteristics opposite each other on separate continua. Whereas androgyny is a static state--sexual roles forever frozen--the Jungian function model emphasizes the fascinating ebb and flow of paired energy producing impulses in all of us. Energy production (and its result: human growth) is the focus (goal) of human existence.

One further advantage of the Jungian functions myth deserves mention.

The myth of paired, opposing characteristics has a literary parallel in the poetry of William Blake. Although a century separates development of the two men's theories, Blake's mythological descriptions of the mind and Jung's concepts of the psyche have much in common. Blake's theories are detailed in his later poetry. In the poetry, Albion (the potential self) is characterized as a sleeping giant because the paired characteristics which comprise his psyche are unbalanced. The four Blakean psychic functions are Los (Inspiration), Luvah (Emotion), Urizen (Thought) and Tharmas (Sensation). These functions and others war for dominance in Albion. Despite some gender stereotyping in Blake's mythological cosmos (for instance, his theory of emanations), other aspects of the cosmos are for feminists potentially useful. In fact, based on Jung's theories and Blake's mythology, feminist critics may be better able to understand the inward journey toward awareness taken by Albion's slumbering sister, Albia.

My point is that a feminist mythology based on these Jungian-Blakean notions has a history. We are not merely inventing a story which will serve our needs, but are adapting for our own purposes a set of symbols, a pattern of ideas already long in use. How might this feminist mythology be used in literary studies? For one answer, consider Oedipa Maas, whom Cathy Davidson discussed in her MMLA paper. In Oedipa's characterization, as Davidson pointed out, a tension is developed between opposing aspects of Oedipa's personality. On the one hand, Oedipa is reluctant to leave behind the comfortable ritual of grocery shopping and Tupperware parties. On the other, she is compelled by a fascinating urge to assert her independence. These contradictory inclinations--assertiviness vs. passivity--create a tension in Oedipa's characterization. An examination

of these opposing characteristics as well as attendant paired features would reveal much about the dynamics of Oedipa's personality. This shift in emphasis to a functional types model from androgyny would not result in the exclusion of social considerations. To the contrary, once we avoid confusing social roles and innate behavior characteristics, we can focus with greater clarity on society's role in the process of individuation. Nor does this movement away from androgyny toward a study of the whole psyche obviate the role of feminist criticism. Feminist critics will continue the important task of teaching and writing about women authors and characters.

Finally, I should like to propose one further myth-model of potential interest to feminist critics: transactional analysis. Practitioners of T.A. are also aware of the dangers of sex role stereotyping and are currently seeking methods of breaking it down. In Scripts People Live, Hogie Wyckoff calls these stereotypes "banal scripts" which, she says, promote "a predetermined, stilted, and repetitive way of acting in life...Sex roles have...been reified by psychiatrists; for example, the Anima and Animus archetypes of Carl Jung."[22] Changing a woman's behavior by reeducating the "parent" (or superego) aspect of her psyche is the T.A. approach to the problem. Those of us in literature may be able to work cooperatively with transactional analysts, assisting in and benefiting from the "rescripting" process. Equally important, the T.A. schema of the human mind may provide us with another model upon which to base feminist literary criticism.

There is little time this morning to do more than present these potential feminist "myths of wholeness." Their application to literature

is left to you. In closing, however, let me remind you of an often quoted line from Blake's Jerusalem: "I must create a system or be enslaved by another man's."[23] In several ways, feminist critics should take Blake's statement to heart.

Mary Pringle Spraggins
Wright State University

Footnotes

[1]Carolyn Heilbrun, Toward a Recognition of Androgyny (New York: A. Knopf, 1973).

[2]Nancy Topping Bazin, "An Androgynous Reading of Edith Wharton's The House of Mirth," A paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Modern Language Association, 1975.

[3]Cathy N. Davidson, "Oedipa Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Or, Feminist Possibilities of the Androgynous Vision in Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49," A paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Modern Language Association, 1975.

[4]Bazin, p. 1.

[5]Davidson, p. 1.

[6]Mary Spraggins, "The Woman Androgyne: Jung, Jong's Isadora, and the Androgyny Debate," A paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Modern Language Association, 1975.

[7]Cynthia Secor, "Androgyny: An Early Reappraisal," Women's Studies, Vol. 2, 1974.

[8]Daniel A. Harris, "Androgyny: The Sexist Myth in Disguise," Women's Studies, Vol. 2, 1974.

[9]Spraggins, p. 9.

[10]Roland Barthes, Mythologies, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).

[11]Percy Bysshe Shelley, Prometheus Unbound: Selected Poetry and Prose of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. Carlos Baker (New York: Modern Library, 1951).

[12]Joan Bamberger, "The Myth of Matriarchy: Why Men Rule in Primitive Society," Women, Culture and Society, ed. Louise Lamphere and Michelle Rosaldo, p. 267.

[13]Monique Wittig, Les Guérillères, trans., David LeVey, (New York: Avon Books, 1973).

[14]Joan Bamberger, "The Myth of Matriarchy: Why Men Rule in Primitive Society," Women, Culture and Society, ed. Louise Lamphere and Michelle Rosaldo.

[15]Bamberger, p. 269.

[16]Bamberger, p. 270.

[17]Bamberger, p. 276.

[18]Bamberger, p. 280.

[19]Bamberger, p. 280.

[20]Bamberger, p. 280.

[21]Carl Jung, Man and his Symbols (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1964), p. 61.

[22]Claude M. Steiner, Scripts People Live (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), pp. 196 and 210.

[23]William Blake, Jerusalem, Plate X, lines 20-21.